



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2021

Life in the time of Covid goes on. In the time period covered by this newsletter the Club managed two birding outings, one general excursion, and one regular meeting. We held an outdoor meeting for our end of year breakup. Our February excursion had to be abandoned at short notice due to the snap five-day lockdown imposed the day before. Nevertheless we remain in good spirits and look forward to 'normalcy' returning.

Besides the reports on these activities, this edition of the newsletter includes an article on land planarians from Roger Standen, and a correction from John Eichler of the Victorian Field Naturalists Club to the report on the Greens Bush excursion in the December newsletter.

December 9, 2020 Meeting

It had been a long time since our last evening meeting—since March in fact. We had a few very enjoyable excursions in between, but meeting in a hall seemed a long way off. So we had a picnic meeting for our Christmas meeting, at Beauty Park Frankston, near the Civic Centre. Luckily it was a fine dry night (as we had no Plan B.) We had a good turn up of 15 members, our usual sumptuous Christmas hamper raffle, and Show and Tell.

Roger brought along some photos and a live specimen of gall wasp in a tiny tube (see separate notes). Graeme brought along his shell collection, all neatly labelled and logged onto iNaturalist. They were a treat to see, beautiful specimens.

When it got dark at 9pm it was time to go home. We are hoping to resume 'normal' meetings in February- fingers crossed!—**Judy Smart**

Gall Wasps

When attempting to find out what was using the galls on an acacia tree, I took some home and awaited their contents to emerge. At the same time I noted that there was a small silken shelter on the outside of one of them. A tiny caterpillar left the gall (they feed on the outer surface of the gall) and proceeded to build the same silken shelter on the edge of the container.

I also cut some galls open that revealed spherical cavities within which each contained a tiny larva, but of what? I now had at least two insects utilising the galls.

Over time, the silken shelters turned out to be the pupal shelters for the Wattle Gall Miner (*Polysoma eumetalla*), a delightful little iridescently coloured moth in the

Gracillariidae family. They are only 4-5 mm long and could be easily overlooked. They are found from Tasmania to Queensland.



Wattle Gall Miner (*Polysoma eumetalla*) adult & pupal shelter

The internal larvae turned out to be those of miniature wasps. One was a parasitoid wasp (*Megastigmus* sp), 2-3mm long, and the other, a smaller, unidentified wasp, was from the superfamily Cynipoidea.



Parasitoid wasp (*Megastigmus* sp) & Wasp larva inside the gall
Photos by Rog Standen

There is a lifetime of exploration of what lives within and upon these varied galls we see on plants. I am informed that we rarely see the initiator of the galls, but those lifeforms that utilise them once triggered. These galls are triggered by a rust.—**Rog Standen**

Birding at Langwarrin FFR 7th December

Our last birding outing for 2020 was to Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve. When the birding group was started—I believe by the great Peggy Mitchell, perhaps with others—it was a proper birdwatching group, intent on spotting as many birds as possible. Over the years it has become more of a general field naturalist outing, spending as much time looking at plants, fungi and insects as at birds. In addition, plants and fungi (and some insects) are much easier to photograph than birds, so birding group reports in these newsletters tend to have more photos of these than of birds. In view of this I resolved to adorn this report only with photos of birds. After all, reports in the Birdlife newsletter don't have pictures of orchids, mushrooms or butterflies! I was on a quest.

Things got off to a bad start when the day turned out to be cold and overcast, threatening rain, and with a cold gusty wind. We met at the Warrandyte Road end of the SEC Break and immediately started looking for Horned and Tongue orchids. Early arrivals had spotted Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and Eastern Rosellas, but the birds soon made themselves scarce. Proceeding along the SEC Break we made some more interesting sightings—a brilliant metallic green Tachinid fly, some Fairies Aprons, a Common Grass Blue butterfly, a field of flowering Native Parsnip, a patch of flowering Swamp Isotome—but, sadly, no birds. My quest was already in trouble.

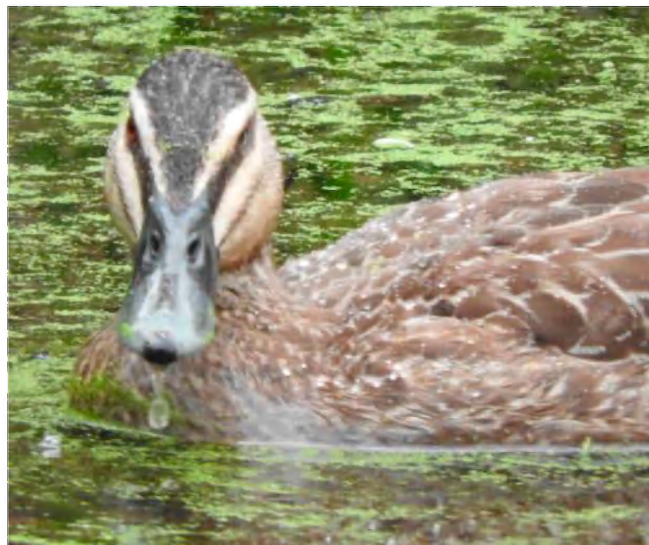
We heard some birds, such as a Pied Currawong somewhere in the distance, some Red Wattlebirds, and I think Rainbow Lorikeets; then finally a bird appeared, perched high in a dead tree. While I was pondering whether a picture of a Common Blackbird would be well received, it flew away. 'Shoot first and ask questions later!' I admonished myself, not for the first time.

Continuing along the Stringybark Track we heard and then saw some Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, but none stayed still long enough for me to get a photo. Turning up the eastern Owen Dawson track we could hear Rufous Whistlers, Yellow-faced and White-eared Honeyeaters, and Grey Shrike-thrush, but only caught a fleeting glance of the latter. Movement caught my eye a little off the track and I spotted a raptor. It was either a Brown Goshawk or a Collared Sparrowhawk, but it flew before I could examine its toes, let alone get a photo. Sparrowhawks are known to breed in Langwarrin, and I have seen them there before (and taken photos of their toes), so that's probably what it was. (Two weeks later, at the same spot, I was repeatedly swooped by a Collared Sparrowhawk; on that occasion I got a very close view of its toes!)

Emerging onto the Long Circuit Track the consensus was that it was lunch time so we headed back to our starting point. A brief shower during lunch induced all but one birder (i.e. me) to go home. I still didn't have a photo of a bird.

So I drove around to the McLelland Drive entrance and set

out again, north to the Dunes Track. Apart from hearing a Grey Currawong, I could add no new birds. Returning to the Reservoir Track I saw (briefly) Grey Fantails and Brown Thornbills, but moving too fast for a photo. I thought of the Black Ducks that reside on the Reservoir, and when I got there I was in luck. Finally, a photo of a bird to go with the birding report! Not very exciting, I suppose, but something to start with.



All photos by Lee Denis

Further photo opportunities presented: an echidna, a Varied Sword-grass Brown butterfly, a moth I won't even try to identify. Then I walked into a drama: a Grey Currawong being harrassed by a White-eared Honeyeater. Through binoculars I could see that the Currawong had something in its beak. The photos I took were not very good quality, what with the distance, the foliage, and the bad light, but they show the Currawong holding a small bird, which I surmised could be a nestling of the honeyeater.



It's interesting how the birds behave in this situation. The bigger bird flies to a branch, being harrassed by the smaller bird; then they both perch some distance apart for a spell; the bigger bird takes flight and the smaller bird immediately

returns to the chase. They repeat this pattern several times while in view, then both fly out of sight. I would assess the harrassing intensity of the White-eared Honeyeater as well below that of a Noisy Miner though.

I decided that I could get a good photo of an Eastern Yellow Robin sitting on a nest, that I had seen previously, but before I got there the rain came down in sheets and I had to settle for good photos of Pacific Black Ducks and a dodgy photo of a Grey Currawong holding a small bird. I decided to rate my quest a success, and went home.—**Lee Denis**

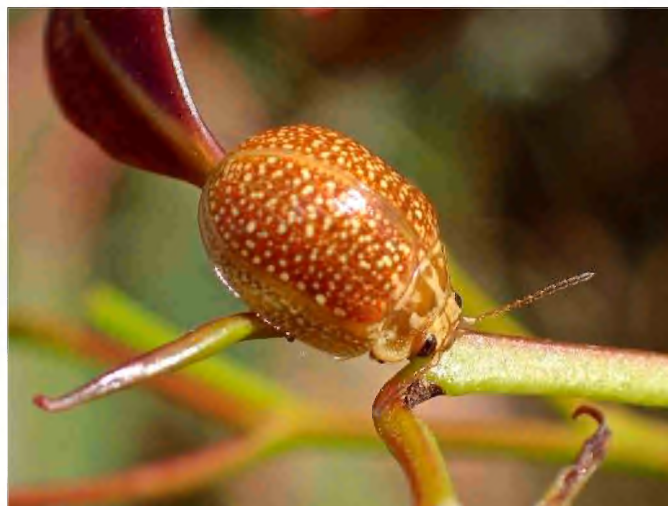
PS: Later the same week I returned on a much better day, saw more birds, and photographed the aforementioned Yellow Robin on its nest in a Eucalypt sapling, about 2 metres above the ground.



Sawfly or Leaf Beetle?

The December 2020 edition of this newsletter includes a report on an excursion to Greens Bush and one of the images in that report shows a cluster of insects, tentatively identified as sawfly larvae. When approached these larvae rear up and release defensive chemicals like those of sawflies however they are actually the larvae of a leaf beetle (family Chrysomelidae).

A check of images on the citizen science website, iNaturalist reveals that these are the larvae the Eucalyptus Variegated Beetle, *Paropsisterna cloelia*. This is by far the most commonly encountered member of a mostly endemic genus, which includes at least 50 Victorian species. The larvae and adult beetles both feed on Eucalyptus leaves and the colour and pattern of the beetle can be quite variable. *Paropsisterna* and related genera are dome shaped and can retract their legs antennae and eyes, which is useful on leaves that are often patrolled by ants farming leafhoppers aphids and the like. — **John Eichler** (Photos by John Eichler)



Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 12th December 2020

The Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne is the ancestral home of the Mayone-Bulluk clan of the Boonerwurrung people. From 1889 until the 1960s the site was used by the military, with licences also issued for sand extraction, grazing and timber felling.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne was established in 1970, for the purpose of the conservation, research, display and enjoyment of Australian native plants. The Gardens first opened to the public in 1989.

Members Heather, Leanne, Lee, Velimir, William and Pat

met at Stringybark Picnic area on a mild, sunny day and spotted a group of Superb Fairy Wrens in the car park.

We commenced our walk along the Manna Track to the Wetlands Walk. While on the Manna Track, we met a walking group of people coming towards us, who warned us about a Tiger Snake, sighted on track but which had moved off into the bush.



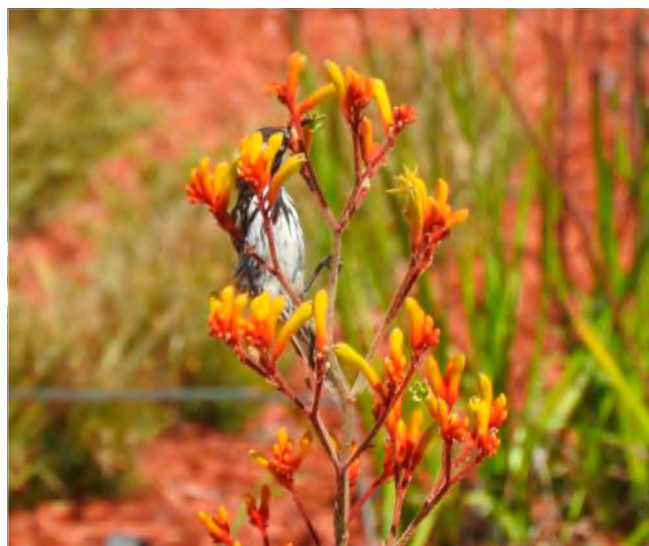
Photo by Velimir Dragic

On the Wetlands Walk, a man on a bicycle sighted a Tiger Snake that also disappeared into the bush. So the snakes were up and about.

We joined the Wylies Creek Track with cleared grassland on our left, and sighting an Eastern Grey Kangaroo resting among trees, soon we came across an Echidna well sighted by Velimir. We turned on to the Lake Track 2, where we stopped to see water birds on the lake. Sighting Black Duck, Wood Duck, Purple Swamp Hen, Hoary-headed Grebe, White-faced Heron, Welcome Swallows, Willie-Wagtail, Grey Fantail and also a Black Wallaby.

We continued along Lake Track 1 and joined up with the Wylies Creek Track with Swamp Scrub, grassland and further on, Heathy Woodland on our right. We passed the Elisabeth Murdoch Pavillion on our left and reached the Woodland Picnic Area where groups of people were enjoying the outdoors. We spoke to people who had seen a Bandicoot. We walked on and joined the Trig Point Track and lookout, where a 360-degree view across south-eastern Victoria including Westernport and Port Phillip Bay, Mount Macedon and the Melbourne CBD. A Wedge-tailed Eagle was sighted. Some members checked out the Perched Swamp, which was empty and dry. The Trig Point Track joined up with the Manna Walk, taking us back to the Stringybark Picnic Area, where we enjoyed a late lunch.

Afterwards, Lee and Leanne decided to continue exploring, but the other members voted to call it a day, but a most enjoyable day. Thank you to Velimir for his bird list-total 38 birds.



New Holland Honeyeater in the Australian Garden

History of the Royal Cranbourne Gardens copied from the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne and Melbourne brochure.—**Pat Gomm**

Penguin Paradise: Sub-Antarctic Islands of New Zealand **Heather Ducat, 10th February**

This is Heather's 19th talk to us! All of them wonderful. This talk was going to include Macquarie Island, but Heather decided to save that for another day- something to look forward to.

This cruise was a 50th wedding anniversary present to themselves - Robert and Heather. It was on the *Spirit of Enderby*, with NZ Heritage Expeditions, a small boat with 50-60 passengers.

The twelve day trip left from Dunedin and returned to Bluff, at the bottom of South Island. They visited Snares, Auckland and Campbell Islands, all NZ territories, as well

as Macquarie Is, an Australian territory. They travelled in the Roaring 40s and the Furious 50s, from 47° to 54° S.

The climate is cool, cloudy and windy, with a top temperature of 15°C. The islands are World Heritage, and a NZ environment officer travelled on the cruise to protect the environment.

This region is designated as a world centre of floristic diversity, with 314 plant species, including 243 New Zealand indigenous, and 35 endemic to New Zealand Subantarctic. Some are derived from now-extinct Antarctic plants.

The islands have six vegetation zones which are transitional from NZ alpine to Subantarctic:

1. Tussock grassland, mainly *Poa*
2. Shrubland: *Coprosma*, *Hebe* and ferns
3. Forest: *Olearia*, Tree Fuchsia, and Rata (*Metrosideros umbellata*)
4. *Dracophyllum* forest - grass trees
5. Megaherb field and subalpine grassland
6. Cushion bush and sphagnum bog

The megaherbs are remarkable for their large foliage (thought to be an adaptation to cool, humid conditions) and large bright flowers. The *Anisotome* species are carrot-like, but 1 metre tall, with large pink flowers. *Bulbinella rossii* is a 1 m high lily, with large yellow cone flowers. The *Pleurophyllum* species are giant perennial daisies, with large leaves and clusters of large purple florets. *Stilbocarpa polaris*, the Macquarie Is cabbage, is a rhubarb like plant 1m high, with yellow flowers. The edible leaves and stems combat scurvy, and were eaten by sealers.



Megaherb: *Bulbinella rossii*
All photos by Heather Ducat

The first island seen was Snares Is, 200km south of the South Is, and 3km x 3km in size. It has high cliffs of volcanic origin, and can't be landed on by tours, only approached by Zodiac. Four albatross species breed there, along with Sooty Shearwaters, and the Snares Crested Penguin—60,000 nest there, their only predators being Hooker's sea lions. There are also forest birds, such as Tomtit and Silvereye.



Hooker's Sea Lion

Next stop was the Auckland Islands, 465km from South Is, and much larger—28km x 39km. Before going ashore passengers' clothing and boots were checked by the Officer for seeds and soil. The coast is glaciated, with basalt columns. It rains on average 27 days per month. These islands were grazed, and had supply huts built for shipwreck survivors. Pigs and goats were released, but the islands have been free of introduced animals since the 1990s. Interesting birds were the Yellow-eyed Penguins (also found on South Is), Rockhopper Penguins, the flightless NZ Teal, endemic Pipit, Subantarctic Skua, Tui, Bellbird and Red crowned Parakeet. Another surprise was the Helmet orchid *Corybas sulcatus*.



Eroded Volcanic Tuff, Auckland Island

Campbell Island is further south, 700km from South Is, and too cold for trees, (not enough days over 10°), very windy, and rains 325 days per year on average, with a mean average temperature of 6°. It is 18km x 15km. Sheep and rats have been eradicated, and subantarctic flora and megaherbs are now flourishing. There were thousands of nesting Campbell Is Albatross, Royal Albatross, and endemic Campbell pipits.



Perserverance Harbour, Campbell Island

NZ has the most diverse seabirds- 120 species, with many Albatross species, as well as Petrels and Skuas, not to mention Penguins.—**Judy Smart**

Fascinating Land Planarians, or Flatworms

When moving a pot in the garden I found a curled up, slimy, but debris-covered worm-like creature. Having seen a few of these before, I recognised it as another of the Land Planarians (or Flatworms), the third species that I have found in our yard (all found under pots that I moved). This was the Two-toned Planarian (*Caenoplana bicolor*) that is found from Victoria through to Queensland. One of the others was *Anzoplana trilineata*, that Dr Leigh Windsor, who seems to be the expert on these things in Victoria, says is native to the Ballarat area and when found elsewhere has been most likely carried there in pot plants. Anyway, finding the Two-toned specimen got me searching to find out more about these strange beings.



(left) Two-toned Planarian (*Caenoplana bicolor*), covered in debris (some has been scraped off to see what this thing was) that they do when conditions are dry, to avoid the body from drying out.

So, these small carnivorous animals don't seem to have a brain, just a central nervous system. They can self-reproduce by attaching their rear end that contains their sexual organs, to something and wrenching that piece off the body, only to regrow the tail-end with new sexual parts and have a new body and head grow on the discarded tail within about 10 days. Some can reproduce sexually, in which case eggs are laid in a cocoon and hatch after about three weeks.

They crawl along by the movement of tiny filaments or cilia on the underneath 'foot' as they follow the scent of their prey.

Perhaps even more bizarrely, they generally have only one external opening, which serves both as a mouth for food ingestion and an anus for waste disposal. There is no specialised digestive system (nor respiratory system) as we know it, but they generally empty corrosive digestive juices out onto their food prey to dissolve it and then suck it all back in again. Some can eat small prey whole. Either way, if they can't find any food they can survive for over a year without any food! I wasn't prepared to find such fascinating things about such an innocuous little creature, but it shows yet again what we have right under our noses, or pot plants!

Some of our members might remember the brilliantly coloured species (*Caenoplana dubia*) that Judy found at Bunyip SP a couple of years ago, on our dragonfly outing, that was feeding on something that was most likely the larva of an unknown arthropod. It was very slimy and shows the size that some of these can grow to. Much more attractive than the recent sighting in my yard.—**Rog Standen**



Above: Land Planarian (*Caenoplana dubia*) found at Bunyip SP – left; feeding on arthropod larva – right; crawling over Judy's hand showing the relative size. All Photos by Rog Standen

Main source of info was: <http://cesaraustralia.com/sustainable-agriculture/pestfacts-south-eastern/past-issues/2015/pestfacts-issue-no-4-23rd-june-2015/terrestrial-flatworms/>

Birding at Balbirooroo 1st February

Our first birding excursion for 2021 was to Balbirooroo wetland in Balnarring. Nine members took part on what was forecast to be a fine warm day, but didn't quite live up to expectations. Although remaining fine, with only a light breeze, the sky was overcast all day, with the temperature straying at times into the chilly side. Nevertheless the birds were abundant.



Superb Fairy-wren. All Photos by Lee Denis

Bird counts at Balbirooroo are usually good because the general area comprises a number of different habitats in a fairly small area. In addition to the actual Balbirooroo wetland, which has an area of open water, a shallow more ephemeral section of wetland, and reedy margins, there is a second wetland called Pun Pun; there is a pocket of woodland; and the reserve is bounded on one side by a school and on the others by paddocks. Immediately adjacent to the wetland is a large farm dam, which usually holds quite a few birds. Each of these habitats has its own bird population.



Shelducks on the Farm Dam

The least populated on this visit was the open water of the main wetland. Often you will find spoonbills, ducks and grebes there, but on this occasion the water was quite high and only one Australasian Grebe was sighted. Purple Swampheens stalked in the reedy fringes. Birds on the farm dam and surrounds included Australian Shelducks, Black Swans, various other ducks, Coots, Masked Lapwing and a pair of Latham's Snipe. Black-fronted Dotterels patrolled the edges.

On the wet paddocks nearby, amongst horses and cattle, were White-faced and White-necked Herons, Great Egret and Straw-necked Ibis. Cape Barren Geese grazed on the dry paddocks. An Australian Pipit was a somewhat unusual sighting.

The only sighting on Pun Pun Wetland was another White-necked Heron.



White-necked Heron on Pun Pun Wetland

In the surrounding bush sections there were the usual bush birds—Golden Whistler, Brown Thornbill, Red-browed Finch (a flock of 8-10 juveniles, lacking the red brow), Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Butcherbird etc. Honeyeaters included Red and Little Wattlebird, Yellow-faced, White-plumed and New Holland.

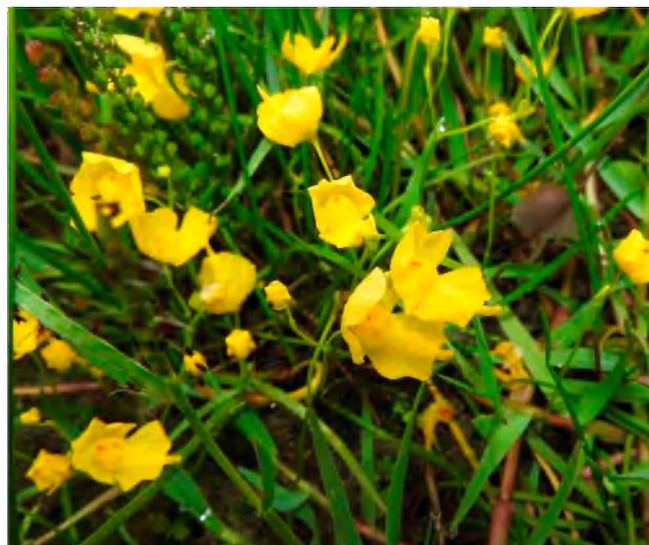
The various adjoining habitats make for some slightly unusual juxtapositions, such as Willie Wagtail and Grey Fantail perched on the same fence wire.

The delineation by habitat was evident also in the feral birds: Starlings on the paddock, Greenfinch, Spotted Dove and Common Myna on the margins, and Blackbird and Goldfinch in the thickets.

Our final bird count of 52 was considered quite satisfactory.
—Lee Denis

Footnote: Not bird-related but of interest from a field naturalist perspective: Judy spotted some yellow-flowered bladderworts growing on the mud of the ephemeral wetland—probably floating when the water was higher. These we identified as *Utricularia gibba*, Floating Bladderwort. This is not an indigenous species, but is being spread beyond its established range, by people or perhaps by birds.

According to Vicflora (<https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au>), it is indigenous to East Gippsland and also NT, Qld, and NSW. It is also found in New Zealand, New Caledonia, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and is a common weed of aquaria and botanic gardens throughout the world. It is not recorded on the Vicflora site for the Peninsula south of the Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve, where it is present in the reservoir.



Bird List For Balbirooroo 1 Feb 2021

Black Swan	Purple Swamphen	Eastern Rosella	White-plumed Honeyeater	Little Raven
Cape Barren Goose	Eurasian Coot	Laughing Kookaburra	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Pipit
Australian Shelduck	Latham's Snipe	Superb Fairy-wren	Eastern Yellow Robin	Red-browed Finch
Australian Wood Duck	Black-fronted Dotterel	Spotted Pardalote	Golden Whistler	European Greenfinch
Pacific Black Duck	Masked Lapwing	White-browed Scrubwren	Grey Shrike-thrush	European Goldfinch
Chestnut Teal	Silver Gull	Brown Thornbill	Magpie-Lark	Welcome Swallow
Australasian Grebe	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Red Wattlebird	Grey Fantail	Fairy Martin
White-faced Heron	Common Bronzewing	Little Wattlebird	Willie Wagtail	Common Blackbird
White-necked Heron	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Noisy Miner	Grey Butcherbird	Common Starling
Great Egret	Rainbow Lorikeet	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Australian Magpie	Common Myna
Straw-necked Ibis	Crimson Rosella			

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website.

President:
Coralie Davies

All correspondence to
Secretary
Judy Smart

Annual Subs due July

Adult \$30
Concession \$25
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Newsletter edited by Lee Denis

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